

"The City Tavern"  
3206-08 M Street, N. W.  
Georgetown, D. C.

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HABS No. DC-81

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Washington 25, D. C.

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Original and Subsequent Owners: Clement Sewall proprietor until 1799; Charles McLaughlin until 1801; Joseph Semmes until 1805. It was a Tavern until the 1830's, subsequently a drugstore owned by O'Donnell family. Ground floor rented for various commercial purposes. Building now vacant.

Present Owner: Georgetown Redevelopment Corporation

Date of Erection: Built 1796 on part of original Lot 47

Number of Stories:  $3\frac{1}{2}$  with dormers across rear only

Architectural Notes: Until recent years this building has served a number of commercial uses, during which time the street floor has been gutted and a stucco facade superimposed, yet above remains the early, even severe, brickwork in Flemish bond. A five-bay composition with string course that carries across at the sill line of the third storey windows, results in a facade that must have been all the more imposing against the foil that was the Bank of Columbia (before alterations). Inside, one finds the fine stairway is intact above the first floor, likewise dog-ear mouldings, carved chair rail, some paneling, together with specimens of plaster cornices. An outbuilding may possibly date back to the "Store House" described in an ad of 1801. This latter building, now divorced from the City Tavern property, is owned by Capital Transit.

Historical Notes: Researches of Dr. Oliver W. Holmes, III, of the National Archives and Cornelius W. Heine, Historian for National Capital Parks, are responsible for the identification of this building and that adjoining, as the City Tavern and Bank of Columbia respectively. City Tavern was center for a large and important cross-section of early capital and national history. Its first proprietor was Clement Sewell who was innkeeper until 1799. Charles McLaughlin followed until 1801, then Joseph Semmes until 1805. Semmes operated it under the sign of the Indian King and established it as a stop on stage routes to and from the Federal City. The Tavern has close associations with Jefferson and Adams. Jefferson's letters reveal that he held the place in high regard and that he recommended it to important visitors. Plans were laid here for greeting John Adams in 1800 as he arrived at the District boundary and he was escorted to the White House by Georgetown citizens. Townspeople later entertained him at City Tavern with an official dinner on June 6, 1800. It was President Adams in 1804, who commended its central location to the artist, Charles Willson Peale.

Selected Documentation: Meeting of Citizens of Georgetown at McLaughlin's tavern (City Tavern) on Saturday May 31, 1800. Resolved: that an address be prepared by Uriah Forrest\* J. M. Langan, W. H. Dorsey and presented welcoming the President to the banks of the Potomac. (President Adams arrived in Georgetown on Tues. June 3 and he was promptly met at D. C. boundary line by a large number of citizens and escorted into town amid charges of musquetry and artillery)

\*Col. Forrest was an original proprietor, and comrade of General Washington. It was at his house the agreement was made between Washington and the proprietors to sell the land for Washington City.

Centinel of Liberty, June 6, 1800, p. 3 Harvard University

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An Entertainment was given to the President of the United States by the Citizens of Georgetown on Friday last (June 6, 1800) at Mr. McLaughlin's Tavern (City Tavern) "A numerous company sat down to dinner, after which the following toasts were drunk.."Seventeen toasts were given, the one given by the President, in reply, "George Town, may its prosperity equal the ardent enterprise of its inhabitants, and the felicity of their situation." After the President had retired, another toast to the President was given.

Centinel of Liberty, June 10, 1800, p. 3 Harvard University

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Election of Bank of Columbia Directors (12) .. to be held on March 20, 1802 at the Tavern of Mr. Joseph Semmes\*

\*The directors of the first bank were the leading men of the Colonies. See Washingtoniana, George Washington University.

Washington Federalist, March 18, 1802, p. 3 Boston Athenaeum

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The next morning we set out for Washington (June 1) arrived in time for late dinner..the next morning I waited on the President who advised me to take lodgings at the City Tavern, that we might be nearer him and more in the centre of the places we should visit. After breakfast I accompanied the Baron (Humboldt) and other gentlemen to wait on the President, who had known before the high reputation of the

Baron philosopher and ingenious of nature that had travelled a great deal - after leaving the President's, our company walked to Georgetown .. the President sent us an invitation to dine with him at  $\frac{1}{2}$  past three the next day (Monday). Our party were invited to take tea with Mr and Mrs Samuel Smith where we found a number of ladies. We visited the Navy Yard..we proceeded to the Capitol.. where the great national counsels sit to frame laws for the Government of the United States. One wing of this stupendous and elegant building being yet unfinished and the center not begun...

Diary of Charles W. Peale, May 29, 1804 MSS Division, Library of Congress

References: Contributions of Mrs. Allan G. James and Cornelius Heine

Cornelius Heine, The Old Stone House, unpublished report, pp. 93-4

Prepared by: Worth Bailey and Russell Jones, HABS, National Park Service, November, 1959.

Approved:

*Dick Sutton*  
Chief Architect

Date 11/25/59

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